

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-07 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00
USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 AID-05
DHA-02 OMB-01 /077 W
-----111533Z 125693 /53

O R 111258Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1857
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USLO PEKING
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 3589

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: INDIAN ELECTIONS: COMING DOWN TO THE WIRE

REF: NEW DELHI 3214

SUMMARY: POLLING BEGINS ON MRCH 16 AND THE CAMPAIGNS BY
CONGRESS AND THE OPPOSITION HAVE REACHED PEAK INTENSITY. AFTER
A SLOW START IN SOME AREAS, THE CONGRESS IS BEGINNING TO SHOW
SIGNS OF COUNTERING THE "JANATA WIND". MRS. GANDHI REMAINS THE
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CONGRESS' SOLE HOPE FOR STEMMING THE TIDE: HER RECENT
SOUTHERN TOUR APPARENTLY ENERGIZED THE PARTY THERE, AND CONGRESS2
MEN IN THE NORTH EVIDENTLY HOPE SHE CAN PULL OFF A "MIRACLE"
IN THE HINDI BELT, WHERE SHE WILL CONCENTRATE HER CAMPAIGN IN
THE FINAL DAYS. ASIDE FROM MINOR ADJUSTMENTS IN SOME STATES,
PREDICTIONS ON THE EVENTUAL OUTCOME WHICH WE HEAR CONTINUE TO
RANGE BETWEEN 270 AND 300 SEATS FOR THE RULING PARTY. BUT THE

MANY IMPONDERABLES CITED IN REFTEL AND PREVIOUS MESSAGES LEAD US TO TREAT THESE PREDICTIONS AS "GUESSTIMATES". THE FINAL TWO DAYS WILL BE CRUCIAL, AND A LAST-MINUTE CONGRESS INFUSION OF RESOURCES COULD TIP THE SCALES IN SEVERAL CLOSE RACES. ELECTION RHETORIC CONTINUES ALONG THE STANDARD THEMES ALTHOUGH THE OPPOSITION HAS RAISED THE SPECTRE OF "RIGGING". LAW AND ORDER GENERALLY PREVAILS, ALTHOUGH THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASE IN VIOLENT (BUT NOT SERIOUS) INCIDENTS. END SUMMARY

1. WITH POLLING DAY FAST APPROACHING, BOTH THE CONGRESS AND THE OPPOSITION ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS ARE IN FULL SWING. AFTER A SLOW START IN SOME AREAS, CONGRESS SEEMS TO HAVE FINALLY GOTTEN ITSELF TOGETHER AND LAUNCHED AN INTENSIVE CAMPAIGN IN MOST AREAS. WHILE THE NEWSPAPERS AND OBSERVERS CONTINUE TO TALK ABOUT THE JANATA WIND, WE ARE RECEIVING SCATTERED INDICATIONS THAT THIS WIND MAY BE ENCOUNTERING STAFFER CONGRESS RESISTANCE IN SOME AREAS AND THAT THE PROSPECTS FOR SOME CONGRESS CANDIDATS MAY NOT BE AS BLEAK AS PREVIOUSLY BELIEVED. IN THE SOUTH THE CONGRESS CAMPAIGN APPEARS TO HAVE GAINED MOMENTUM, MOSTLY DUE TO MRS. GANDHI'S RECENT WHILRWIND TOUR THROUGH THE FOUR SOUTHERN STATES. THERE IS EVEN SOME SPECULATION THAT IN SEVERAL STATES (MOST NOTABLY IN THE SOUTH) THE OPPOSITION CAMPAIGN MAY HAVE PEAKED TOO EARLY AND THAT THE PM HAS TIMED HER ELECTION TOURS PERFECTLY TO GIVE CONGRESS MORALE A MAJOR BOOST JUST AT THE TIME THE OPPOSITION CAMPAIGN HAD BEGUN TO SAG.

2. THE PM HERSELF SEEMS TO BE THE MAJOR (AND PERHAPS ONLY) CAUSE FOR THE INTENSIFIED CONGRESS ACTIVITY AND BRIGHTER FORTUNES. HER ENERGETIC BARNSTORMING TOURS HAVE BEEN ATTRACTING LARGE CONFIDENTIAL

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CROWDS AND SHE SEEMS TO HAVE LOST MUCH OF HER PREVIOUS DEFENSIVENESS BY VIGOROUSLY ATTACKING THE OPPOSITION. THE PM WILL CONCENTRATE HER CAMPAIGNING IN THE NORTH FOR THE LAST WEEK BEFORE POLLING AND SOME CONGRESSMEN IN U.P. HOPE THAT SHE CAN PROVIDE THE "MIRACLE" WHICH WILL RESTORE THE PARTY'S FORTUNES. AT THE SAME TIME THE OPPOSITION HAS SENT ITS FORMIDABLE ARRAY OF SPEAKERS CLOSELY ON THE HEELS OF THE PM IN AN EFFORT TO BLUNT WHATEVER IMPACT SHE MIGHT MAKE.

3. PREDICTIONS ON THE FINAL OUTCOME HAVE NOT CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY SINCE OUR REPORT LAST WEEK. MOST OF TBR DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES (INCLUDING THE SOVIETS, WITH WHOM WE HAVE JUST SPOKEN) CONTINUE TO SPECULATE THAT MRS. GANDHI MAY GET A MAJORITY OF BETWEEN 270 AND 300 SEATS, BUT MANY EQUALLY CONFESS THAT THEY (LIKE THIS EMBASSY) ARE MAKING NO PREDICTIONS TO THEIR CAPITALS. THE STATE-BY-STATE ESTIMATES OF SEATS LIKELY TO BE WON OR LOST BY CONGRESS HAVE NOT SHIFTED APPRECIABLY SINCE OUR LAST REPORT (REFTEL), ALTHOUGH RECENT DIPLOMATIC TRAVELLERS IN SEVERAL STATES HAVE RETURNED WITH MINOR ADJUSTMENTS TO PREVIOUS TALLIES. GIVEN THE FACT

THAT SO MANY IMPONDERABLES ARE PRESENT IN THE CAMPAIGN, THAT THE
FINAL VOTING BEHAVIOR OF THE RURAL ELECTORATE IS LARGELY UN-
KNOWN AND THE FACT THAT SO MANY CONTESTS ARE SIMPLY TOO CLOSE
TO CALL, THESE SPECULATIONS ARE ESSENTIALLY "GUESSTIMATES".
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4. MANY PEOPLE NOW BELIEVE THAT AS IN THE PAST THE FINAL 48
TO 72 HOURS OF THE CAMPAIGN WILL BE CRUCIAL. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE
HEARD THAT THE JANATA HAS BEEN RECEIVING SUBSTANTIAL FUNDS FROM
BUSINESSMEN IN BOMBAY AND CALCUTTA OF LATE, (AS A KIND OF "IN-
SURANCE"), THE OPPOSITION IN THE SOUTH IS RUNNING LOW ON RESOUR-
CES. IN ANY EVENT, CONGRESS CONTINUES TO HAVE THE DECIDED
ADVANTAGE IN TERMS OF RESOURCES. THERE IS WIDESPREAD SPECULATION
THAT CONGRESS WILL MAKE A LAST-MINUTE INFUSION OF MONEY INTO MANY

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CONSTITUENCIES TO TRY TO WIN OVER THE LEADERS OF IMPORTANT VOTE BLOCS AND THAT THESE LAST MINUTE "CONVERSIONS" TO THE CONGRESS SIDE COULD TIP THE SCALES IN MANY OF THE CLOSE RACES. WE HAVE ALSO HEARD THAT NUMBERS OF EDUCATED VOTERS, FEARING POLITICAL INSTABILITY SHOULD THE OPPOSITION WIN A MAJORITY, MAY EVENTUALLY SWALLOW THEIR ANTI-CONGRESS RESENTMENTS AND VOTE FOR CONGRESS CANDIDATES IN ORDER TO ENSURE A STABLE GOVT UNDER MRS. GANDHI AT THE CENTER. DESPITE ALL THE TALK ABOUT THE "EXCESSES" OF THE EMERGENCY, THE KEY QUESTION IS WHETHER PEOPLE WILL VOTE ON MARCH 16 THE WAY THEY ARE TALKING ON MARCH 11 OR WHETHER WE ARE WITNESSING A SORT OF CATHARSIS WHICH WILL ENABLE THE INDIAN VOTER TO GO TO THE POLLS AND--HAVING PURGED HIMSELF BY HIS COMPLAINTS-- CAST HIS BALLOT FOR MRS. GANDHI.

5. AS FOR ATMOSPHERICS, NEITHER WE NOR THE CONGENS HAVE NOTED ANY SIGNIFICANT CHANGES FROM OUR LAST REPORT. THE THEMES AND SLOGANS REMAIN MORE OR LESS CONSTANT, ALTHOUGH OPPOSITION LEADERS ARE INCREASINGLY CHARGING THAT THE CONGRESS MIGHT TO TO "RIG" THE ELECTION OR OTHERWISE INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME. CHARAN SINGH WARNED THAT THE MILITARY MIGHT HAVE TO TAKE UP THE GOVT IN ITS HANDS IF "UNCONSTITUTIONAL ACTIONS" ARE COMMITTED IN THE CAMPAIGN. HE AND OTHER OPPOSITION LEADERS HAVE ALSO CHARGED THAT GOVT OFFICIALS "EXPERT AT MANIPULATING ELECTION RESULTS" ARE BEING TRANSFERRED TO KEY CONSTITUENCIES IN U.P. AND THAT HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF DUPLICATE BALLOTS HAVE BEEN PRINTED. JANATA SPOKESMEN HAVE ALSO EXPRESSED APPREHENSION ABOUT THE PRIME MINISTER'S INTENTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF REPORTS OF LARGE-SCALE DEPLOYMENT OF BSF AND CRPF FORCES AROUND THE COUNTRY. A BRITISH HICOMM OFFICER CONFIRMS SOME POLICE AND MAGISTRATE REASSIGNMENTS IN U.P. IN THE LAST TWO WEEKS BUT WAS UNABLE TO DETECT ANY PATTERN DURING A VISIT LAST WEEKEND. DIPLOMATIC VISITORS TO OTHER STQTES HAVE NOT RPORTED SIMILAR SHIFTS. BSF IS PREDICTABLE ON EVE OF THE ELECTIONS (DIPLOMATIC ENCLAVE PROTECTIVE POLICE BATTALION WAS WITHDRAWN FOR ELECTION DUTY LAST WEEK. JANATA GENL SECY L K ADVANI MARCH 11 TOLD PRESS HE SAW NO RPT NO PROSPECT FOR LARGE-SCALE RIGGING OF THE ELECT-
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ION. ON THE LAW AND ORDER FRONT, SERIOUS VIOLENCE CONTINUES TO BE MINIMAL. A FEW CLASEHS HAVE OCCURRED BETWEEN RIVAL GROUPS IN DELHI, U.P. AND WEST BENGAL, BUT OBSERVERS AGREE THAT THIS IS A FAR MORE ORDERLY CAMPAIGN THAN IN THE PAST. FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES CONTINUE TO PLAY A NEGLIGIBLE ROLE (SEPTTEL).
SCHNEIDER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: NATIONAL ELECTIONS, ELECTION CAMPAIGNS, ELECTION FORECASTS
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977NEWDE03589
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770084-0837
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From: NEW DELHI
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Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770369/aaaaciop.tel
Line Count: 224
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
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Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 NEW DELHI 3214
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3135800
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INDIAN ELECTIONS: COMING DOWN TO THE WIRE
TAGS: PINT, IN
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/3ec7bab9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009